

# Mewar Painting

## Kumar Sangram Singh of Nawalgarh

Mewar, the land of Sisodia Rajputs, made great contributions to the Indian chivalry and patriotism. They faced the onslaught of the invading Muslim invaders to save their religion and sovereignty, whereas their women walked smilingly to perform Johar. Today the name of the invaders, their grandeur & kingdoms have disappeared completely, whereas the land of the Sisodias—Mewar—still remains very much alive and is prospering, with the efforts of all clans and castes.

Along with bravery, the rulers and the people were great worshippers of arts, literature and architecture. They made a great contribution to the cultural heritage of the country. Today we find oldest paintings from this region in Rajasthan.

Geographically Mewar enjoys a very important position, the hills, forests and lakes have made it a very fertile land, a good hide out in event of danger, without creating any food scarcity. Even during troubled times the artists and artisans continued their creative pursuits.

Amongst the Diwans of Iklangji, Rana Kumbha (1433-1468) was a great scholar, fond of music and a great builder. He wrote commentaries on Kumar Sambhava and Gita Govinda. Today his victory tower stands majestically at the Chittorgarh Fort. Then comes Rana Sanga (1509-28) amidst the first Mewar Rulers to face the Mughals. Bhojraj, his son, married the famous poetess MIRA whose devotional songs are sung from North to South and East to West of this vast country.

He was followed by a few rulers. Then came Maharana Udai Singh to face the armies of Akbar and who shifted his capital by founding the city of Udaipur, which is known as the Venice of India, as it has beautiful lakes, with houses and the majestic palace situated on the lake and the Jag Mandir as a pearl, in the midst of the famous Pichola lake. The painting upto this period belongs to Western Indian Style (Jain School) (Plate 1) and cannot be called as purely Mewar as the style was prevalent in Gujrat, Mewar, Marwar, Jaisalmer and other parts. Earliest being SUPASANAHA CHARIYAM dated 1423 of Mewar origin. and later the works of art of 1525 to 75 A. D. illustrating Geet Govind, Chaur panchacika etc were executed.

Now comes the period of the great Maharana Pratap (1572-1597) who was

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a very bold man and had never learnt to bend before any power or force, at any cost. He faced the worst days, as did his people but under no circumstances he was prepared to yield and believed in keeping the banner of Mewar high. He received full co-operation, in facing powerful emperor Akbar, from his supporters, his people and specially the Bhils which fought shoulder to shoulder with his other soldiers. The battle of Haldighat was nobody's victory or defeat. He changed his capital from Udaipur to Chavanda to give a tough and rough time to his foes.

Maharana Pratap did not get much time of leisure to patronize arts as he was always busy in protecting his land and people from slavery and insult. We do find traces of Kulladar style (Plates 2) in about (1575-80). Unfortunately not a single authentic and contemporary portrait of this great son of Bharat has been traced so far, whereas portraits of many contemporaries to him at the court of Akbar have been found including those of Raja Man Singh of Amber (Bharat Kala Bhawan Collection-Varanasi) and of Raja Faisal Durbari (Chaster Betty Collection-Dublin-Ireland).

He was succeeded by his son Amar Singh (1597-1620) and circumstances compelled him to accept the sovereignty of the Mughals. The result was that the relations with the Mughal Emperor became closer and there was peace in the land of Mewar. The attention of the Ruler and his people were diverted from wars to creative side. Thus we find a set of Raga-Mala painted at Chavanda in 1605. From this set of dated paintings, one is in the collection of Shri Gopi Krishna Kanodia (Calcutta). These paintings are in typical Mewar style and were executed by Nirsaradi.

The areas influenced by the Mewar style are the whole of Udaipur, Banswara, Partapgarh, Dungarpur, Kushalgarh, and Shahpura. Being the neighbours of Mewar even the Malaea, Bundi, Sirohi Schools and Godvar district of Jodhpur did adopt certain qualities of the Mewar School.

Mewar played an important and a predominant role in evolving an individual style in Rajasthan from the traditions of the western India School (Plate 3) the other areas also by the beginning of the 17th century developed their own modes of expression in different styles according to their local traditions. They used bright colours, had a simple way of depicting the subject but is still full of great artistic qualities. According to Dr. Moti Chandra—'The beginning of the Mewar school, at least as seen in 1605, verge on a folkstyle, in which all the expedients of careful draughtsmanship or perspective are held subservient to the Joie de Vivre of folk art'. We find a lot of material of Maharana Jagat Singh I (1628-61) (Plates No. 4, 5, 6, and 7) period for study. By the middle of the 17th century the art of painting of Mewar got more sophisticated and started adopting the qualities of the Moghal school.

In the period of Maharana Raj Singhji (1661-81) the statue of Srinathji was

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installed at Nathdwara and the Vaishnava doctrinaire of the Vallabhacharya sect spread in the area, with Krishna becoming the supreme God and the Bhagwat Puran becoming the gospel of the Vaishnavas. We find many illustrated Bhagwats in various collections which are the splendid examples of art at its zenith. The Ramayana also became popular. The Ragamala and Barah-Masa also became very common. The theme of the Barah Masa was always very romantic and depicted the departure of a hero and the heroine finds one or the other pretext to stop him from leaving the home. In this theme festivals and seasons play a very important part in favour of the heroine.

The other important subject executed by the Mewar artists was the Rasikapriya of Keshvadasa. The works depict the classification of heroes and heroines, their mutual fascination, attachments, separations and reunions. Jaideva's Gita Govinda describing the love of RADHA and KRISHNA was also favourite due to the commentaries by Maharana Kumbha in Rajasthani language.

The mid- 17th century paintings of Mewar have brilliant colours such as lacquered red, saffron, yellow, brown and lapis lazuli. The same painting may have two different backgrounds depicting two different subjects divided or partitioned by a tree or any other object. The figures have prominent noses with the nose-ring projecting out and not touching the cheek of the lady. The faces are oval with fish-stylized eyes but easily recognizable, find a variety of creepers and plants. The hills and rocks are depicted very simply and generally pink or mauve in colour. Water is painted black with strokes of white to depict waves and foam at the shore. The faces are always profile and the paintings have less perspective. The main incident has greater importance than others in the same painting. The emotion is not depicted by expression but through the colours, surroundings and gestures of persons. The artists also depicted the animals and birds found in Mewar or kept by persons in that area as pets. The night sky is dark with moon and stars where as the hot season is depicted by a golden sun, just like the emblem of Mewar rulers. People are shown wearing the round Jama with a decorated patka and a turban representing the Akbar and Jahangir period. Earlier works have the pointed or the CHAKDAR JAMA. Women are shown with skirts which has strips or plain or with floral patterns, the bodices (cholis) and a transparent Odhnis (wimples). The black pompons and tassels are very common up to the mid-17th century on the arms and wrists. The building, domes, arches, pillars etc. are not very decorative but are simple and pleasing (Plate 8).

LORD KRISHNA plays an important part as a lover or as a romantic person, he is a hero in all such subjects and also in the Ragamala and Baraha-Masa. The canvas becomes wider in scope by the middle of the 17th century and upto 1725. In later period very big size paintings were also executed. The artists painted court life depicting love-affairs, hunting expedition, processions, maffils, picnics, accidents, fights, battles, marriages in an artistic manner and present to us an

appropriate commentary on the social life in Mewar. The artists adopted very simple way of depicting their subjects in the best aesthetic manner. They lacked high technical excellence if one compares it with the contemporary Mughal draughtsmanship, perspective and fine finish. They applied on the canvas glowing colours which made a painting very charming and attractive. The paintings do not appeal to the court alone but to people in general because the subjects are well known to the people and they are well-acquainted with and love them.

The period between 1652 to 1698 is a bit confusing as much dated material is not available, even then from the style and subjects some works could be placed in that period, for example the Gita Govinda paintings in my collection, some paintings in the Bharat Kala Bhawan collection and the Bhagavata Purana in Shri Gopi Krishna Kanodia collection

In the beginning of the 18th century paintings became very popular but quality suffers at the expense of quantity. Not only the rulers of Mewar patronised art but also the Thikanadars, business communities, religious leaders and others. Now more attention was paid to the social and court life of Mewar. Amarsingh period artists executed paintings in a different manner, using less colour and more in Shah-Kalam. Even his dog, monkeys and other animals were finely painted on big size canvases.

Maharana Sangramsingh II (plate 9) was very fond of getting his portraits executed. The artists used large size canvases for portraits. They applied thick colours to depict different types of jewellerys and even used beetle wings to depict emeralds. The events connected with his life were also painted in large numbers, he is shown going out in procession, attending maffils and shooting wild animals. Many manuscripts too were illustrated and written during his reign.

The art continued to be patronised during Jagat Singh II period and many dated material is available in Saraswati Bhandar. There was less patronage between 1762 to 1760 A.D. When Arsi came to the throne again the art of painting received patronage. He was a ruler fond of hunting (plate 18). The artists depicted grass and bushes not with the help of a brush but with a cloth pad which was filled with cotton and dipped in green colour for giving patches on the paintings (plates 11 and 12). The effect is quite fascinating and natural. The same style was continuing during Hamir's time who was not a great patron of art).

Bhim Singh (1778-1828) was again a great patron of art and the atelier was probably headed by some competent artist who painted many paintings showing the Maharana returning successfully after hunts. The works are in big size and nice in colour scheme, composition and technique. Other artists of his court painted the life of Mewaris in general and have shown the Rasa in his harem with his queen (plates 13, 14, 15),

We find a lot of portraits of Maharana Jawan Singh (1828-1834) period

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but the art now starts deteriorating in all respects, may be because a treaty was signed with British Government, and like other rulers of Rajasthan the Maharanas of Udaipur also started leaning towards the European art which was realistic and new to the Indian people. The traditional artist started losing the royal patronage, except when religious paintings were required (plate 16).

The palaces started to be decorated by European works which were either Litho prints or etchings or oil paintings. These were the techniques unknown to the local artists and they felt lost themselves and could not fulfil the desire and tastes of the feudal lords which was changing rapidly with the impact of the foreign cultures, even then to earn their bread and livelihood the artists kept on painting according to the whims and wishes of the rulers.

The quality suffered because they started using machine-made papers, brushes and pigments. Same was the fate of technique. Swaroop Singh and Sambhusingh were still fond of paintings which were confined only to hunting scenes and court life which continued to be painted even as late as late Maharana Bhopalsinghji's times. The artists continued to work under the royal patronage with lost traditions, till the independence was achieved in 1947, and the States were merged with the Indian Union. The retrenchment badly hit them and they were thrown out of employment, no body to sympathise with or patronise them. They adopted different professions and gave up that which they had followed and practised for centuries.

Another important centre of painting was Nathdwara where many artists still continue to work. In early days the work was as good as rest of the area (plate 18) but after 1850 it adopted a commercial leaning which completely ruined the art at that place. Though the talent is still there yet there is no body to guide them about technique and other important sides of art. Only tradition subject they paint is the image of Shri Nathji, rest of their works are neither traditional nor realistic.

The paintings executed at the courts of Pratapgarh, Deogarh and Shahpura slightly differ in style from what we call as Udaipur style. The artists at Pratapgarh named Kripa Ram (plate 21) was very good and always placed his seal at the back of the painting. The Jagirdars Ragho Das and Gokul Das at Deogarh were great patrons of art (plates 17, 19, & 20). The Shahpura artists painted elephants and literary painting in a very fine way.

## **Important Sets & Collections**

### ***'Saraswati Bhandar' Udaipur***

1. Gita Govida : 1714 by Bhatta Roopji : 173 illustrations.
2. Bihari Satsai S. 1776/1719 A. D. by Jaggan Nath : 643 illustrations.
3. Panchatantra : Late 17th Century : 583 illustrations.
4. Prithvi Raj Raso : Late 17th Century : 628 illustrations.

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5. Kashi Khand : 337 illustrations.
6. Shakunavati : 106 illustrations.
7. Kaji Dopaiya Mullah : 263 illustrations.
8. Hari Vansha : 677 illustrations.
9. Ikling Mahatma : 93 illustrations.
10. Gajendra Moksa : 17 illustrations.
11. Gaj Chikitsa : 139 illustrations.
12. Ashwa Laksana : 86 illustrations.
13. Yoga Vashistha : 34 illustrations.
14. Proboodh Chandrodaya : 170 illustrations.
15. Ekadashi Mahatmya : 134 illustrations.
16. Brihatakatha : 64 illustrations.
17. Krishna Awatar Charitra : 154 illustrations.
18. Raga Mala : 251 illustrations.
19. Kadambari : 66 illustrations.
20. Saranga Tatwa : 100 illustrations.
21. Saranga Tatwa : 136 illustrations.
22. Saranga Tatwa : 54 illustrations.
23. Saranga Dhar : 66 illustrations.
24. Saranga Dhar : 109 illustrations.
25. Kaliya Daman : 102 illustrations.
26. Panchakhyana : 448 illustrations.
27. Panchakhyana : 125 illustrations.
28. Raghuvansha : 150 illustrations.
29. Triya Vinod : 165 illustrations.
30. Gita Govinda : 224 illustrations.
31. Bihari Satsai : 392 illustrations.
32. Naishadh : 42 illustrations.
33. Sundar Sringar : 234 illustrations.
34. Veli Krishna : Rukmani-ke : 95 illustrations.
35. Prithvi Raj Raso : 628 illustrations.
36. Bhagwad Gita : 717 illustrations.
37. Maha Bharata : 3159 illustrations.
38. Rasik Priya : 88 illustrations.
39. Krishna Charitra : 328 illustrations.
40. Bara Masa : 112 illustrations.
41. Varaha Purana : 26 illustrations.
42. Arsha Ramayana : 72 illustrations.
43. Bhagwat : 10 illustrations.
44. Gokulavana : 4 illustrations.
45. Darshanas : 108 illustrations.

46. Darshanas : 32 illustrations.
47. Arsha Ramayana : 36 illustrations 1708/1651 Painted at Chittorgarh. The Balkand with Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, dated 1649 paintings by Manohar.
48. Raga Mala : 251 illustrations—dated 1768 for Maharani Ranawatji by Bhai Dau s/o Ram Kishan.

*Udaipur Museum*

1. Krishna Charitra 145 illustrations (Arsiji).
2. Sarang Tatwa 54 illustrations (Arsiji).
3. Panchatantra 152 illustrations (18th cent),
4. Malti Madhava 67 illustrations (18th cent).
5. Sarang Dhar 66 illustrations (18th cent).

*Umed Bhawan Collection—Jodhpur*

1. Rasik Priya illustration 1640
2. Raga Mala illustration 1640
3. Bhagavata illustration.

*National Museum of India—New Delhi*

1. Raga Mala (Gem Palace Raga) 1650 A. D.
2. Raga Mala illustrations : 1628 by Sahibdin.
3. Rasikpriya series : 1650 A. D.
4. Bhagavata Purana Leaves : 1700 A. D.

*Bharat Kala Bhawan—Varanasi*

1. Raga Mala Series : 1628 by Sahibdin-1628.
2. Rasik Priya Series : 9650 A. D.
3. Bhagvata Purana Series : 1700 A. D.

*Motichand Khazanchi—Bikaner*

1. Raga Mala illustrations by Sahibdin : 1628.
2. Rasikpriya illustrations : 1650 A. D.
3. Bhagwat Purana illustrations : 1700 A. D.

*Kumar Sangram Singh Collection—Jaipur*

1. Illustration to Gita Govinda 1650-60
2. Illustration to Kumar Sambhava 1650-60
3. Illustration to Geet Gauri 1675
4. Illustration to Raga Mala 1700
5. Illustration to Ekadashi 1750

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6. Many other dated paintings from 1625 to 1800 with names of artists, depicting all types of subjects connected with literature, court and social-life of Mewar are available in this collection.

*Patrons—(Rulers)*

1. Maharanas of Udaipur.
2. Maharawals of Dungarpur.
3. Maharawals of Banswara.
4. Maharawals of Pratapgarh.
5. Raja of Kushalgarh.
6. Rajadhiraj of Shahpura.
7. Maharaj of Nathdwara and Kankroli.

*Patrons—(Jagirdars)*

1. Bedla.
2. Deogarh.
3. Delwara.
4. Bansi.
5. Ghanerao (later it was transferred to Jodhpur state).
6. Badnor.
7. Kelwa.
8. Amet.
9. Kanor.
10. Begun.
11. Bhinder.
12. Asind.

*Other Collections*

1. Illustrated Bhagwata from Udaipur, dated 1648 and painted by Manohar-Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.
2. Illustrated Bhagwata : Kotha Library.
3. Illustrated Ramayana : painted by Manohar dated 1649 Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.
4. Rasikpriya : H. H. The Maharaja of Bikaner Collection of the Mid. 17th Century.
5. Sur Sagar Illustrations : 1650 Shri Gopi Krishan Kanodia Collection : Calcutta.

*Maharanas of Mewar*

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|------------------|------------|
| 1. Udai Singh    | 1541-1572. |
| 2. Pratapsingh I | 1672-1597. |
| 3. Amarsingh I   | 1597-1621. |

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4. Karan Singh	1621-1628.
5. Jagatsingh I	1628-1661.
6. Rajsingh I	1661-1681
7. Jaisingh	1681-1700
8. Amarsingh II	1700-1716.
9. Sangramsingh II	1716-1734.
10. Jagatsingh II	1734-1752.
11. Pratapsingh II	1752-1755.
12. Rajsingh II	1755-1762.
13. Arsi	1762-1772.
14. Hamirsingh	1772-1778.
15. Bhimsingh	1778-1828.
16. Jawansingh	1828-1838.
17. Sardarsingh	1838-1842.
18. Swroopsingh	1842-1861.
19. Shambhusingh	1861-1874.
20. Sajjansingh	1874-1884.
21. Fatehsingh	1884-1933.
22. Bhopalsingh	1933-1956.
23. Bhagwatsingh	1956-